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AUTHOR:

LOVELESS, GEORGE

TITLE:

THE CHURCH SHOWN UP IN A LETTER...

PLACE:

LONDON

DATE:

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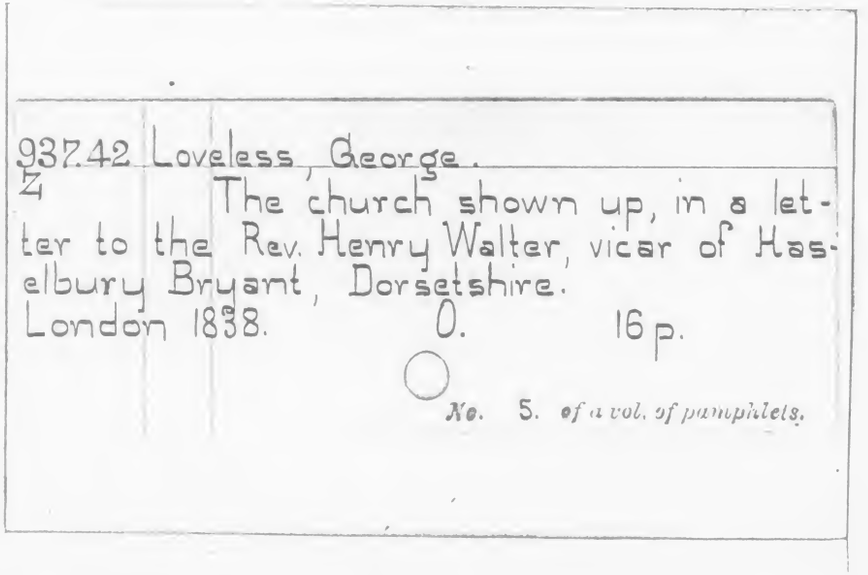
937.42 Loveless, George.
Z The church shown up, in a letter to the Rev. Henry Walter, vicar of Haselbury Bryant, Dorsetshire.
London 1838. O. 16 p.
No. 5. of a vol. of pamphlets.

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TECHNICAL MICROFORM DATA

FILM SIZE: 35mm REDUCTION RATIO: 11X
IMAGE PLACEMENT: IA (IIA) IB IIB
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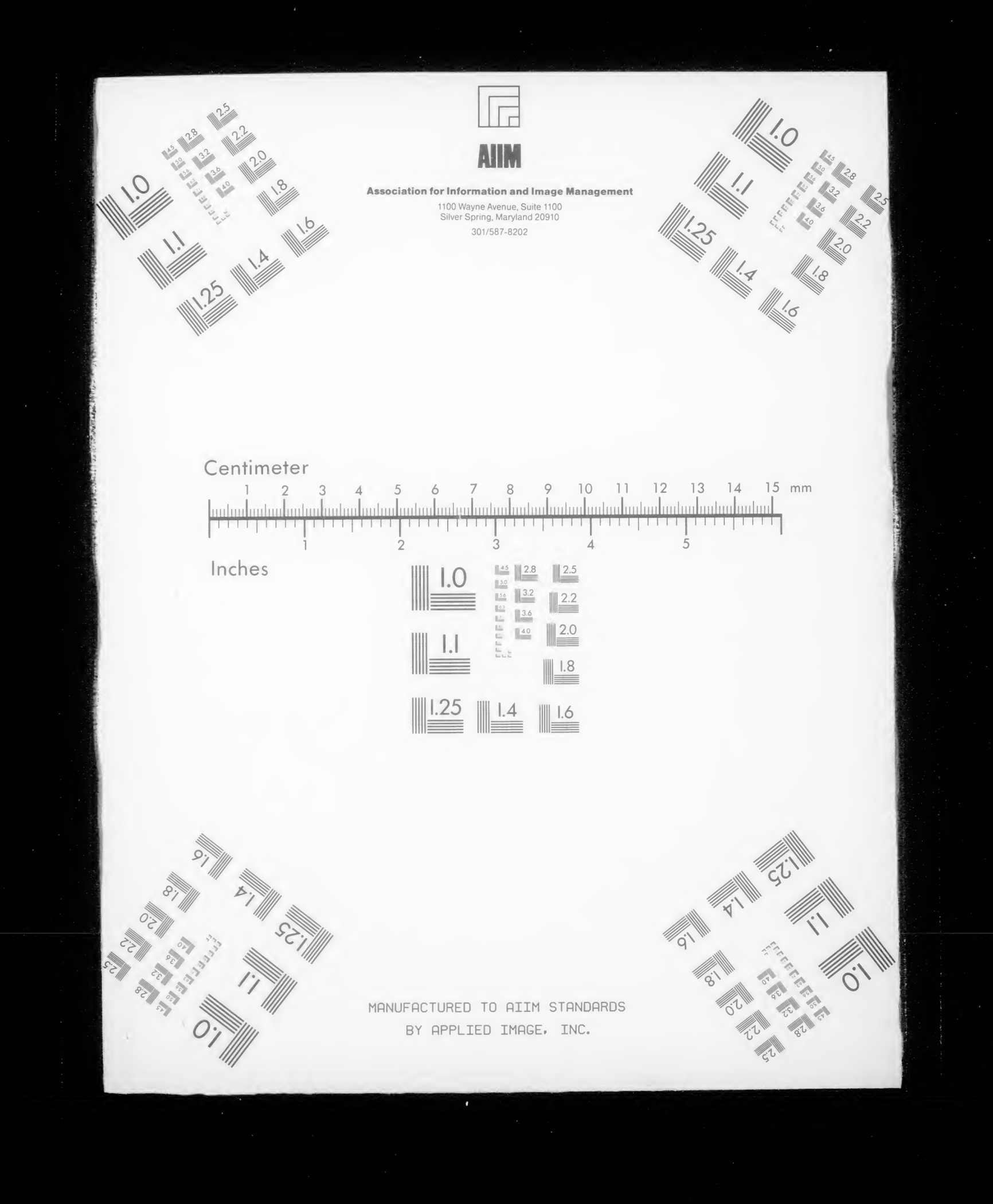
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THE

CHURCH SHOWN UP,

IN A

LETTER

TO THE

REV. HENRY WALTER,

VICAR OF HASELBURY BRYANT, DORSETSHIRE.

BY GEORGE LOVELESS,

ONE OF THE SIX DORCHESTER LABOURERS.

ANY PROFIT ON THIS WORK WILL GO TO THE DORCHESTER VICTIM FUND.

LONDON:

PUBLISHED FOR THE DORCHESTER COMMITTEE, BY

CLEAVE, 1, SHOE LANE; HETHERINGTON, 126, STRAND;
WATSON, 15, CITY ROAD.

1838.

Price Threepence.

A LETTER, &c.

Give me the liberty to think, to speak, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all other liberties.—*Milton.*

Reverend Sir,—In addressing myself to you I adopt the above as my motto, believing that liberty of conscience is every man's birthright; and as the Almighty Creator of man hath blest me in common with others with thinking and reasoning powers, I consider that I should be abusing those noble powers, were I to be silent at the present time and not to speak out boldly and freely in vindication of truth and justice; that I should be withholding an important obligation I owe to my fellow men; and that in so doing I should reproach my Maker and sin against my own soul.

My reason, sir, for thus addressing you is the liberty taken lately with my name by several gentlemen of the clerical order, but especially by yourself. Had you confined your observations to the circle of your own friends, or even to your own parish, I should not have thought it worth my trouble to have noticed it; but as you chose to address others besides your own religious body—to represent, or rather to misrepresent, my character and conduct to them—I have thought it my duty to reply to those calumnies.

Quere, at the clerical meeting on the 12th of Dec. 1837, did the Vicar of Haselbury act the part of father inquisitor?—what could be his motive in writing to the President of the Wesleyan Conference concerning one of whom the president most likely knows nothing and perhaps cares as little? Of the President of the Methodist Conference, as a private man, I know nothing, but judging of him from the situation he fills, I think I have nothing to dread from that quarter. Was his reverence, however, casting a glance a little further? was he looking towards Canterbury? Be this as it may I am thankful that I was not reported to the Pope of Rome. Had this been the case the Pope's bull might ere this have been thundering forth against me with "red lightning and impetuous rage;" all the artillery of the inquisition might have been levelled against me; and, in the end, I might have experienced the gibbet or fiery faggot! But I have learnt not to pin my faith to the sleeves of presidents, bishops, or popes. For what then is all this anxiety and concern —this labour and trouble? Is it to weaken the influence and to bring into contempt an humble and obscure individual? Why this

> "Mighty ocean into tempest wrought?
> To waft a feather or to drown a fly?"

But, sir, I think the why and wherefore will appear obvious if we make a little inquiry. Since my return to England from the land of my captivity, I have laid before the public a brief but plain statement of facts in reference to my trial and banishment; and this appears to be by no means congenial with the views and feelings of a certain "order" of gentlemen; hence it is not surprising to hear one say, "He is guilty of writing palpable falsehoods." I would only say in answer to this charge that it will have but little if any effect as far as I am known; for those that have known me longest will know best if I am capable of falsifying or not; besides these things were not done in a corner. Again, I am charged with being "a strife-maker and a peace-breaker." However assertions are not proofs,

and it will require more proofs to establish this assertion than all my accusers are in possession of. "But how can you think of purchasing Loveless's bad and wicked book?" "And how can you think of entertaining that wicked man?" say some. If speaking the truth with moderation; if recommending all men to live and love as brethren; and if endeavouring to find out the cause of those various evils which afflict the children of men, be a crime, then I at once acknowledge that I am a "criminal," a "strife-maker," and a "wicked man." But in my pamphlet there is mention made of hypocrites and mock religion; and reverend gentlemen have said, "He means us." Ha! what? have I drawn out Leviathan with a hook? This is more than I expected; and it is gratifying to know that while I only drew the bow at a venture the arrow did not miss its mark.

Again, sir, I believe that my visit to your village, and my address to those of your parishioners that chose to hear me, has greatly displeased you, and no doubt was the occasion of your sounding the tocsin of alarm. Had I spoken either directly or indirectly against your public or private character as a minister or a Christian, some allowance might be demanded as an excuse to justify your plan of procedure; but as no just offence could be taken by any thing that I said or did, I ask by what right you thus stigmatize and cast reproach upon my conduct? Again it is said, "Why if he is allowed to parade about like this we do not know the consequences—he will make the labouring men dissatisfied and discontented." Now this is coming to something like an explanation; this is speaking out; this is pure priestcraft. Alike unchangeable in its tone and temper, its views and desires, it has always, in every nation and under every name, been the same. "Its nature is one and that nature essentially evil; its object is self-gratification and self-aggrandizement; its means the basest frauds and the most shameless delusions. That nothing is so mean in weakness, so daring in assumption, or so arrogant in command; that professing to be merciful, nothing has ever exhibited

itself in shapes of equal cruelty; that proclaiming to others the utter vanity of worldly goods, its cupidity is insatiable and its ambition boundless; that affecting peace and purity, it has perpetrated the most savage wars, and, in the very name of heaven, spread far and wide the contagion of sensuality; that assuming to itself the privilege of possessing the key of knowledge, and the exclusive promulgation of the doctrines of a religion whose very nature overflows with freedom, and love, and enlightenment, it has locked up the human mind for centuries, made it the prey to savage passions, and robbed it of the highest joys of earth or heaven." I could wish that these remarks were only applicable to ages that are fled, and to nations far from us, to pagans and to heathens, but I am sorry that they apply with equal force and propriety to those churches called "Reformed and Protestant." Priestcraft has been the same from the days of the flood to the present year; it has ridden on exultingly, the everlasting incubus of the groaning world; and we at length have learnt one important truth, that state religions and state churches are a curse to mankind.

Now, sir, let us look at the church of England as by law established. Its character appears of the blackest description; we behold things which make our hearts throb with indignation. After the Reformation, "the inquisition was as completely set up in England as in the old priest-ridden countries; and how its powers were exercised may be seen in too fearful colours on the broad page of English history, and also in the more full relations of the nonconformists and dissenters. Clergymen who could not mould their consciences at the will of the state, were ejected without mercy from their livings, and with their families exposed to all the horrors of poverty, contempt, and persecution." What a picture have we set before us of the dreadful persecutions and privations experienced by the Society of Friends, inflicted by the clergy, and the magistrates incited by them; fines, imprisonment and death, confiscations of goods, destruction of their places of worship, age not spared, and their women treated with

brutal indecency; clergymen declaring they "would rather see all the Quakers hanged than lose a sixpence by them!" Nor is this spirit of trying to usurp the throne of conscience and strangling the right of the people from free address to and communion with their Maker, changed or banished from the minds of the clergy of the present age.

I now, sir, present you with an anecdote or two for your consideration. One day while the Catholic Emancipation Bill was in agitation, as I was travelling I fell into company with a teacher in the Establishment, and our conversation happened to turn on the subject. He told me he thought it a great pity that the Dissenters were not willing to join them in trying to prevent the Catholics obtaining their claims. I said, "I thought it criminal to persecute any man for conscience sake, and although men differed in religious opinions I did not see why that should make them worse citizens, or less loyal and dutiful subjects." He said he was sorry to see them so blind to their own interests. I replied, "The Dissenters are not blind, sir, but it is you that cannot see."—"If the Catholics get their liberty," said he, "we shall soon see and feel too; but explain yourself." Having a small book which was open, I pointed to a certain passage and asked, "Can you see that, sir?" He answered "Yes." Having placed a shilling over the passage, I inquired, "Can you see it now, sir?"—"No."—"What prevents your seeing it?"—"Why of course it is the silver."—"That's just it, sir," said I; "it is the money that prevents your seeing in the same light with Dissenters."

The Rev. J. F—— preaching to his parishioners and enforcing the duty of prayer, after assuring them that prayer was one of the best duties in which they could possibly engage, and the most acceptable to God, gravely added the following caution—"Their prayers would be of no avail whatever unless offered up in the Established Church!"

A short time ago I was passing by a place of worship at the hour appointed for divine service, and as the minister officiating stood high in public estimation

as a preacher, I resolved at once to hear him. I now give his text, "Let Israel hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is mercy and plenteous redemption, and he shall redeem Israel from all his transgressions." The sum and substance of his sermon may be summed up in the following words: "The true and only true church of Christ is the church of England as established by law; that a passage in the book of the Revelations —"Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth"—particularly described the church of Rome; that Roman Catholics and the different bodies of Dissenters were joining with infidels to trample on the Bible and trying to overturn the church."

Now, sir, without attempting to dispute the propriety of applying the above passage to the church of Rome—let the reverend gentleman have it his own way—I may perhaps be allowed to draw one inference, which the clergyman seems to have forgotten, but which struck my mind forcibly at the time. If the church of Rome be a "mother," she has children; if she be "a mother of harlots," her daughters must be prostitutes; then is not the church of England one of those prostituted daughters?

It is not for me to attempt to vindicate the proceedings of Dissenters against such unfair attacks, I leave that to themselves; I think they are quite adequate to the task. And as to the infidels, so called; their conduct and example is worthy of imitation by many that call themselves Christians. We see them entering the abodes of wretchedness and want; sympathizing with the weak and afflicted; assisting the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow; while numbers of those that are set apart for the ministration to the necessities of their fellow-creatures, stand aloof, pass by, or treat with indifference, and sometimes even with contempt, the objects of misery that surround them. Whose conduct of the two comes nearest the precepts of the gospel of Christ? I am told "that pure religion and undefiled before God, the Father, is, to visit the fatherless and widow in their affliction;" and "he that hath

of the world's goods, and seeth that his brother stand in need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion against him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"—"I was a hungry and ye fed me, naked and ye clothed me, sick and in prison, and ye visited me; forasmuch as ye did it to the least of these my brethren ye did it unto me."

As far back, sir, as recollection can carry me I have heard it exclaimed, that "the church is in danger!" and from that period to the present time, bishops in their charges, clergymen in their sermons, and high church pamphleteers, have continually reiterated the cry "The church is in danger!" I wonder not, sir, at the increase of Dissenters; I wonder not at the low repute in which the church is held. What intelligent person commencing his religious inquiries, would think of joining a church that, according to the testimony of its own bishops and clergy, is in perpetual danger? What sensible person who finds himself by birth and education a churchman would not, for the sake of his peace of mind, come out from a church which is always in danger? Is it not a marvellous thing that a church supported by all the power of state, and all the wealth of a mighty nation, should always be in danger? What avails the immense revenues, the mitred thrones, and episcopal palaces, the bench of bishops in the House of Lords, the acts of Parliament, and all the buttresses and bulwarks, if, nevertheless, the "church is in danger?" And why should the nation be saddled with the enormous expense of supporting a church so diseased and tottering? Yes, sir, *the church is in danger;* and its connexion with the state, and the corruptions thence arising, is the cause of that danger; its connexion with the state has increased its wealth and worldly-mindedness, which is dangerous to a Christian community; its connexion with the state has a tendency to beget a spirit of bigotry and intolerance in its sons and daughters. It were an easy thing to show that bigotry and intolerance is not buried. I know of gentlemen possessing large estates, that will neither let land to rent, employ a servant, nor, in fact,

employ a person in any way whatever, unless a promise is first given, that they will not encourage Dissenters, nor attend at any place of worship except the church. I know of clergymen who treat Dissenters as the Jews treated the Samaritans, and will have no dealings with them. We read that "no man was allowed to buy or sell, save or except those that had the mark of the beast either in their foreheads or in their right hand." How often is heard from the pulpit cautions against fanatics, schismatics, false teachers, &c. Such conduct reminds me of the game played by the schoolboys with their whip-tops, who let the peaked end downwards, and no longer will it stand than while they are whipping and scourging; whereas if they were to set the broad end downwards it would stand of itself.

But, sir, I am told "if we had no state religion, we should soon have no religion at all." Was religion first established in grandeur and all the pomp of state? Did it require the smiles of the great, the wisdom of the learned, or the wealth of the mighty, to make it spread and grow? No; the Redeemer declared "my kingdom is not of this world;" and when he sent out the first heralds of salvation, which were fishermen of Galilee, he charged them to "provide neither gold nor silver, nor brass in your purses; neither scrip for your journey; neither two coats, neither two shoes;" but added, "go into all the world and preach the gospel, and lo I am with you alway until the end of the world." And they went forth and proclaimed "liberty to the captives and the opening of the prisons to them that were bound:" they rallied round the standard of their master, and whole nations was subjected to their influence; and although they had to contend with the selfishness of kings, the persecutions of governments, the craftiness of priests, and the prejudices of an ignorant populace, it grew and increased, and neither the study of cabinets, nor the policy of states, has been able to suppress or retard it. Christianity is the same still, and the gospel of Christ is an immortal and invincible principle, asking of human governments none of their purblind enactments, none of their artificial esta-

blishments, but only room and freedom to spread and bring every spirit beneath its influence. How different is this from that which assumes the name of religion in our day; mixed with all the glitter of the world, with all the power and pomp of earthly grandeur, in order to recommend itself! and then to persuade us to believe "that religion is bound up in a bundle of life with an act of Parliament."

> "Wide of the church, as hell from heaven is wide,
> The pomp of riches and the glare of pride."

How numerous, too, are the absurdities imposed upon our credulity? What a specimen of clerical logic is it to suppose that a child, unbaptized, is not a human being but a thing, until their mummery has ennobled it—a thing beneath God's notice! What a superstitious belief—what a preposterous notion to think that you cannot lie in peace except in ground over which the bishop has said his mummery! "Who hath consecrated the sea, into which the British sailor in the cloud of battle-smoke descends, or who goes down amidst the tears of his companions to depths to which no plummet but that of God's omnipresence ever reached?—who has consecrated the battle-field which opens its mouth for its thousands and tens of thousands, or the desert where the weary traveller lies down to his eternal rest?—who has made holy the sleeping-place of the solitary missionary and of the settlers in new lands?—who but He whose hand has hallowed earth from end to end, and from surface to centre—for his pure and Almighty fingers have moulded it!—who but He whose eye rests on it day and night, watching its myriads of moving children—the oppressor and the oppressed—the deceivers and the deceived—the hypocrites and the poor whose souls are darkened with false knowledge! Does the honest Quaker sleep less sound, or will he arise less cheerfully at the judgment day from his grave, over which no prelatical jugglery has been practised, and for which neither prelate nor priest pocketed a doit? When will the day come when the

webs of the clerical spider shall be torn not only from the limbs but from the souls of men?"

Have not the clergy during the late cruel and disastrous wars, which have caused so much poverty, misery, and vice, advocated the principle, and been the abettors, of impressing the poor for the army and navy, taking them from a lawful calling, making legal murderers of them, and offering up prayers that they may murder and destroy to a great extent; and if that was done, then returning God thanks—that God whom we address as the author of peace and lover of concord—making him a party to massacre, anarchy, and plunder;—Him who says "Thou shalt do no murder; love your enemies, bless them that curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you: if he smite thee on the one cheek turn the other also: blessed are the peacemakers;" and hath added, "whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven."

The following is an extract from a sermon preached at the cathedral church of St. Peter, Exeter, by the Rev. Edward Drew, L.L.B., and considered so good by the aristocracy that it was printed and circulated,—"By the holy name of God himself—in his blessed name and by his sacred authority, I entreat, I beseech, I adjure you to take up arms, which he will bless; and to make a religious vow in this temple of the Most High, that you will never lay them down till your dear country be secure, even from the breath of insult; yes, as the ambassador of Jesus Christ, whose most glorious title is the 'Prince of Peace,' in such a cause I dare to tell you that it is your Christian duty to conquer or to die. The voice of nature which cries aloud in your hearts for your country is the voice of God; the indignation with which your blood boils against her barbarous enemies is a holy anger. God has breathed it into you to strengthen your spirit, and to nerve your arms for the day of combat. The weapons which you lift up for her are armour from the sanctuary; the

valour with which you resist your foes will be homage acceptable to the Most High." How dreadful is this to hear those that take upon them to preach that gospel which breathes only "peace on earth and good will towards men;" that they should "set man on his brother, and in the name of God lift his hand against the throat of his fellow." What judgments are in reversion—what vengeance awaits those who are the authors and abettors of such ungodly and inhuman practices!

> "If a nation is to perish in her sins,
> 'Tis in the church the leprosy begins."

How often has it been observed that the clergy are ever foremost in opposing any popular measure that is likely to be carried for the good of the people: their conduct at the time the Reform Bill was in agitation will not soon be forgotten. If ever they are particularly active it is in electioneering pursuits to bring in a Tory candidate as a legislator, who will assist them in plundering and oppressing the people. You will remember, sir, that at the general election for this county previous to the passing of the Reform Bill, out of 200 clergymen, 12 only voted for the reform candidate! How many of the bishops voted against the passing of that most cruel, unchristian, and inhuman law, the "Poor-Law Amendment Bill," or any other act of coercion by which the working classes may be awed into silence, however numerous their grievances?

What chance, sir, has a labouring man of obtaining justice if the clergyman of the parish (more especially if it be in an agricultural district) is ill-disposed towards him? It is a fact, sir, and one which has often come within my knowledge, that working men having made application to a magistrate for relief, were not allowed to be heard unless they had a written note from the minister; and when sometimes individuals have been under the displeasure of the minister, they have actually been the bearers of that which has prevented them from obtaining that relief they sought and needed. The undue influence, however, of the clergy over

various degrees and orders of society, is greatly on the decline; the working classes are beginning to question their value and utility, and to think that they can do without their assistance. And is it not natural and reasonable for them to think so while they hear one saying that "fifteenpence per week is sufficient to procure all the necessaries of life;" another "threepence per day is quite enough for a working man to subsist upon;" a third that "with seven shillings per week a man, his wife, and family, could be quite comfortable;" and others that the Poor-law bastilles are the best things that were ever known for the "*lower orders.*"

Is it not also a fact, sir, that there are those who would curse any people under heaven for tithes? But the time has gone by for this to pass unheeded. The poor are rapidly becoming their own teachers, and it is in vain you try to hoodwink and keep them in darkness; light is appearing around them; they see men as trees walking; they do not want to be told that they are destitute and miserable, for they feel it; they also begin to discover the cause of that misery, want, and wretchedness. They see that labour is the source of wealth, and that "if there be any true definition of property, it is that which defines it as the thing which man creates by his own labour;" that all men are born naturally free, and that all have an unalienable right to receive a sufficient maintenance from the land that gave them birth; that they are kept in poverty and degradation by those who, living in luxury and idleness upon the fruits of their labour, tell the working man his portion is to labour, to suffer, and to die. Notwithstanding all the efforts of the clergy to impress this upon their minds, as a command from God, the labouring classes have learnt that, living in a country which overflows with the abundance of the fruits of their labour, the tenth part of which they never enjoy, the first great object they ought to have in view is their own emancipation from mental and political slavery; that the earth was given to man for an inheritance and

not to become the property of individuals: that if any man will not work he ought not to eat; that all property honestly acquired should be held sacred and inviolable; that all governments and laws should exist for the common benefit, protection, and security of all the people, and not for the emolument or aggrandizement of any particular family, single man, or set of men.

These things, sir, are becoming more and more the topics of inquiry and conversation amongst the millions who produce the country's wealth; they see that the chief cause of their weakness, wretchedness, starvation, and liability of ending their days in a miserable bastille, separated from their relatives and friends, after a life spent in toil and woe, arises from their having listened to those who have endeavoured to impose upon their ignorance and credulity, in order to divide and split them into factions and parties, to draw their attention from the real object they ought to have in view. The rapid march of intelligence, the increased spread of knowledge, is progressing and prospering, and will ere long scatter its healing, saving, and benign influence over and around the darkness and ignorance of the human mind, until all will see and know their real position, and when they will prove union to be strength and knowledge to be power: then will they stand up with the bold front of men determined to shake off the trammels of despotism; and when the people are thus instructed and united in all their moral dignity, demanding their just rights with a voice that sounds like thunder, or as the rushing of mighty waters, no tyrannical power on earth dare resist them.

In conclusion, sir, I would assure you, that from the Bible may be extracted all those principles of morality and justice the practice of which would increase the happiness of mankind; and that, ultimately, stripped of the appendages and mystifications of priestcraft, it will rise above all opposition, and will go down with revolving ages, enlightening the faith, enlivening the hope, enlarging the charity, enkindling the love, up-

holding the zeal, and directing the conduct of men, until the end of time.

That our country may be preserved in peace and prosperity, the people increase in knowledge and advance in happiness, and the nations of the earth look on each other with friendship and affection, is the sincere wish of

Sir, your's respectfully,

GEORGE LOVELESS.

Tolpuddle, Dorsetshire, Feb. 1838.

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